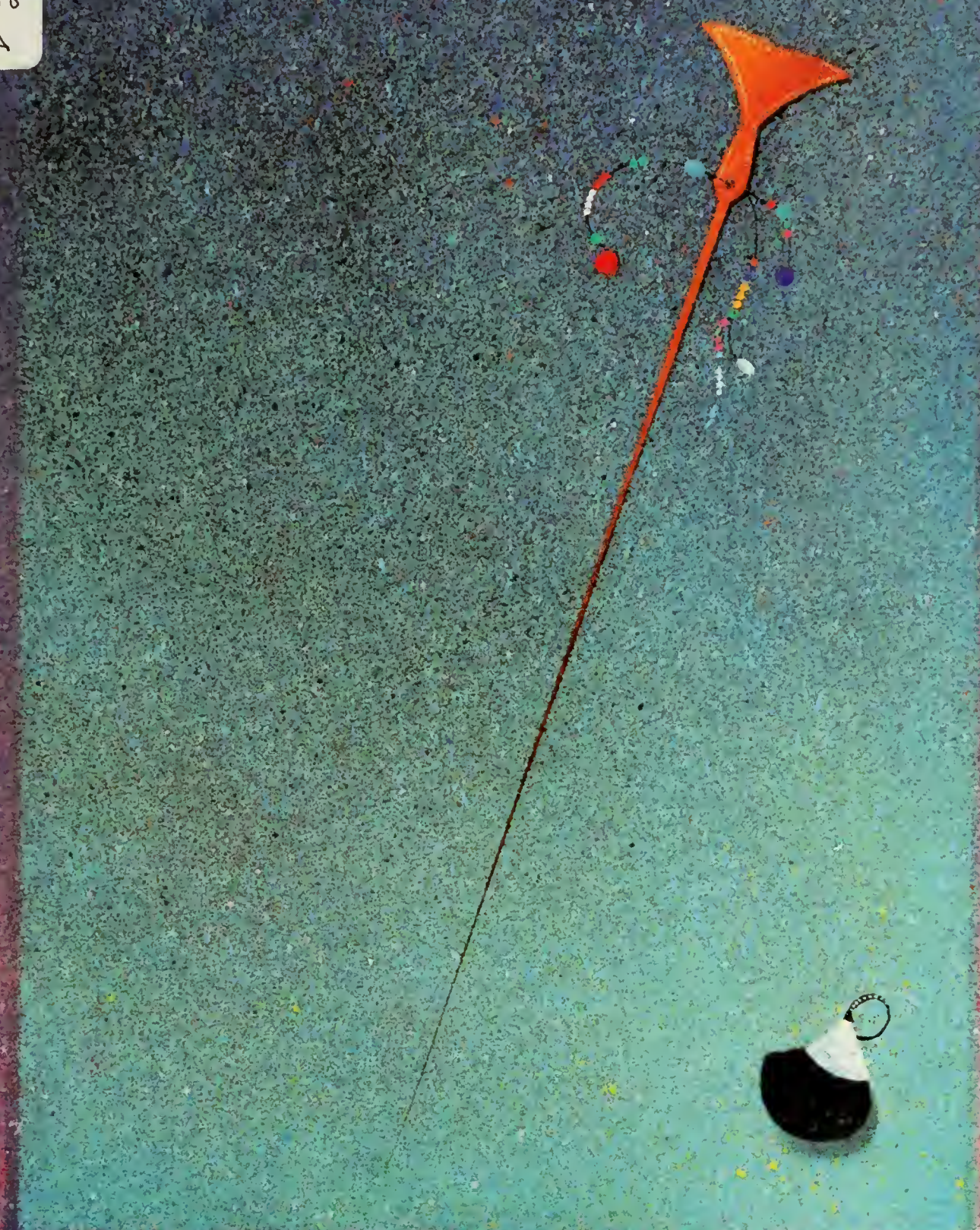


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Gallery
The art magazine from Gallery Delta

No 31

Sponsoring art for Zimbabwe

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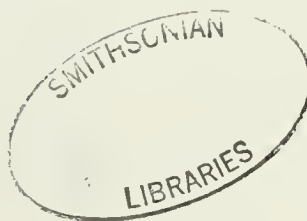
The Young Artists Speak

by Alberto Quembo, Daniel Williams, Sibongile Marowa,
Alexandra Wernberg, Nontsikelelo Motiti, Ana Uzelac

front cover:
Thakor Patel
King 1995
Mixed media
photo credit:
Danielle Deudney

back cover:
Thakor Patel
Sculpture 1994
Mixed media
photo credit:
Danielle Deudney

this page:
Arthur Azevedo
A Group of Women
2002
Wrought iron



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Artnotes

'I believe if a work of art makes its viewer feel something – even if it is total disgust – the artist has succeeded.'

'...enjoy the art work for its face value – what you see – and not what you think you should see...'

'...if someone who doesn't know anything about art was to see it, he or she would just say, what is this?'

'Every artist has a desire for knowledge that is beyond learning, and so cannot be tested.'

'...the exhibition was half pleasing and half boring.'

These quotations are taken from the review essays by young artists who were asked to comment on an exhibition in which they were taking part (see page 24). All of the essays were characterised by an unmediated candour and freshness, and all displayed an enthusiasm for the subject without which any art writing is lifeless. They were only very lightly edited for publication; little in fact was necessary, and if the intermittently erratic punctuation, or the extravagant use of exclamation marks, betray a measure of literary inexperience, they also serve to underline the passion that the writers feel.

One of the fascinating aspects of these pieces, is their self-reflective and unselfconscious commentary on the nature and purpose of art criticism itself. 'Art', writes Ana Uzelac, 'holds a divine and ancient beauty that does not require the explanation of words.' Perhaps not, but Ana's own brief analysis of why painters paint, and why we should look at their paintings, is an eloquent argument for the contrary view. The 'explanation of words' can be useful in further illuminating a work for the viewer; in offering a new perspective on a familiar image or style; in stimulating reflection; or in providing an entry point for the consideration of something novel and unfamiliar. It can also throw light on the artists' biographies, their personal histories and cultural antecedents.

None of this is to demean art's divinity and beauty. Nor, though, is it intended as a device for improving the quality of the artist's work – any more than a review of Yvonne Vera's latest novel is intended to make her pull up her socks and do better next time.

At times, to be sure, critics do stray across the line from illumination to didacticism, but the temptation is better resisted; reviewers


are not teachers, and their readers are not small children.

Both Alberto Quembo and Nontsikelelo Motiti point out a tendency of some painters to plough a furrow rather too close to that of their predecessors, or their more prominent contemporaries. They are right to do so, provided that they can support their claim with solid evidence (although the brevity of the essays hardly allowed for that), but the purpose of the critique is to contextualise the work, not to preach to the artist.

The critic needs to be able to distinguish between mimicry and tribute, between plagiarism and influence. This requires knowledge and experience: knowledge of the work of many artists, and experience enough to be able to analyse the motives and means behind a particular work. If one painter appears to be retreading the themes and preoccupations of another, there can be many reasons for it, not all of them ignoble. If techniques and styles appear to be borrowed, we need to be guided toward an understanding of why this might be so.

Alberto Quembo exhorts the artists to 'forget about getting rich overnight', implying that the motives of some are unambiguously financial. (Had he gone further, the editorial pen would have been wielded to avoid legal action...) He may be right, but we owe to the targets of our accusing tone a reasoned and detailed assessment of their work and its genesis.

In the next issue of Gallery we will look at the often flagrant – and invariably mercenary – 'passing off' in the world of stone sculpture, whereby an artist represents his work as being that of someone else more famous. The virus has not infected Zimbabwean painting, and the preponderant response of our young critics to their colleagues' work was one of admiration and encouragement. Had they descended into a rout of mutual praise-singing, it would of course defeat the very purpose of the critical exercise. But this is not the case; what we read in their essays is an enthusiastic survey of youthful art – what they liked, and why they liked it – and an excited determination to play a part in its maturing future.

That future is clearly in good hands, as Greg Shaw implies in his own review of the Young Artists Exhibition. So too is the future of our art criticism, if these youngsters can occasionally be persuaded to forsake the paintbrush for the pen. 



left: *Adding Nutrients* 2002
Oil on paper

below: *Kudzanai* 2002
Oil on paper



**Chiedza Musengezi visits
Richard Witikani's one-man show**

Man and the Land



Desdymona 1 2002, Oil on paper

Painting at a time when Zimbabweans are experiencing a bewildering array of hardships, Richard Witikani's exhibition 'Man and the Land' at Gallery Delta earlier this year was an enticing invitation to a warm, ordered and harmonious world. Serene landscapes and heavy, round-bodied, unpretentious women dominate his work. There is no agitation or lack of resolution in the compositions. The paintings evoke a longing for stability in a land threatened with conflict, poverty and disease. Bold and fluid strokes indicate the painter's confidence and pleasure with the brush, and earthy colours echo the countryside to where the modern city-dweller can escape, and come back rested and refreshed.

The paintings have the artist's characteristic signature – the ability to look at people and other objects we see every day and capture moments through which we can read new meanings. Figures in the paintings, all of whom are identifiable by name, are people close to the artist: his wife, Dudzai; his daughter, Desdymona; colleagues from the farm where he lives. To those who saw his previous exhibitions, these are familiar names. These are the people who matter to him. They communicate the strong bond that exists between himself and his family and friends. The choice of his subjects may also underline the importance of family and friends for a balanced and meaningful life.



The abundance of female figures in the compositions points to the painter's fondness for the female body. 'Women's bodies are more interesting to paint,' he says. 'In women, you have curves, round forms, heaviness.' Witikani's women are not pretty; they are not decorated. Big and round-bodied, they have no hardness or aggression in them. The softness of their bodies also suggests gentle, hospitable characters. The strong colours of their dress – blue, green, yellow and red – add warmth to their character. Sometimes a cloth is wrapped over the dress to catch the dirt when – as in *Kudzanaï*, for instance – they are women close to earth.

With the exception of the two women in *Adding Nutrients*, all of the figures in the paintings are seated, suggesting rest. The postures probably speak of the time when Witikani sketched his figures. The absence of long shadows suggests early afternoon, when the morning's hard work is done, and the painter can capture his subjects' moments of rest. In *Dozing*, a woman sits with her back against the wall of her house; *Desdymona*, alone and deep in thought, also sits against a wall; a young man in a rugby jersey, *Paying Attention*, sits on the steps below a doorway, the curve of his back supported by a white pillar. *Kudzanaï* sits on a chair with her back to the viewer, looking far into the distance. The painter skilfully draws attention to the heaviness of their bodies. He places them on hard surfaces, with their weight pressing down. Looking at these paintings one cannot help wonder if a sitting position represents something special to the painter. Peaceful, rested and tranquil, his figures create a calm atmosphere.

Men's bodies are not heavy and round. It is their physical strength that strikes the viewer. *Shaishidzai* is a labourer depicted with stature and dignity. He is sturdily built with strength in his arms and shoulders. Dressed in a pair of brown trousers, a white shirt with its top buttons unfastened, a hat to shield him from the sun and wellington boots to protect his feet, he underlines the importance of honest work. *Adding Nutrients* depicts two women with their bodies bent to the rhythm of work in the maize field, and also speaks of the dignity of labour. The curve of their backs echoes the concentration with which they are applying themselves to the task. The lush maize crop is proof of the vitality of the land. The painter creates a hopeful future.



Witikani's figures are all centrally placed, at the heart of his compositions. They have a strong presence. The contrasting colours of the background reinforce their prominence; bold and fluid brush strokes suggest the energetic and spontaneous movement of the painter's hand. His is confident and self-assured. Elements of his compositions are locked into an L shape: the curve of backs against a wall, the sitting bodies pressing hard against the surfaces. The painter pays attention to balance and sometimes he seems so preoccupied with it that even in *Dozing* he does not hint at the loss of bodily control that often accompanies such an act. There is no involuntary droop of the head; the woman holds herself up even in sleep. Perhaps the painter cherishes self-control, stability, and calmness in everyday life. All of the figures are imbued with these qualities. They are desirable qualities that generate respect in people. These figures convey dignity, respect and humanity.

top: *Shaishidzai* 2002
Oil on paper

below: *Dudzai* 2002
Oil on paper

As with his figures, Witikani chooses landscapes that are recognisable, that he is close to. *Dordrecht I* and *II* are places he visited in Holland. The paintings are central to



the theme, 'Man and the Land', capturing the flatness of the landscape and its changes from season to season. In *Dordrecht II*, the front walls of the farm buildings are illuminated with bright light; green trees stand between the buildings and the fields. The painter is not concerned with detail. No parts of the trees are delineated other than the trunk and its main branches; the nature of the crops in the field is unclear. It is the overall impression of the landscape that is achieved. The elements in this composition suggest summer; it looks warm, quiet and peaceful. The light is more muted in *Dordrecht I*. Trees are bare, the grass is brown, and life has retreated to the roots, offering a reminder of the cycle of rebirth and decay. Even though it is not sunny, the red of the roofs and the brush strokes in burnt orange in the front of the buildings give the place a warm atmosphere.



The *Kamoto Farm* and *Goromonzi* series take the landscape theme into more rural areas. The farms lie to the east of Harare, a productive agricultural area that enjoys high rainfall. Anyone who has visited these places cannot fail to recognise them, notwithstanding the lack of specific detail in the paintings. The vitality and spirit of the place is well captured. Open spaces, vegetation and farm buildings make up the common elements in the landscape compositions. The lines and brushwork are not laboured and yet the small scale of some of the paintings means that every stroke matters. *Kamoto Farm* is well treed, especially close to the building. Hills lie further afield but the foreground is almost flat and covered in grass. The atmosphere is peaceful and the land looks fertile. The painter captures the splendour of the place.

Witikani's landscapes and figures convey an ordered and hospitable world; it is a world where ordinary people live in dignity, a world to which he always remains faithful.

Photographs courtesy of Gallery Delta

top left: *Dordrecht I Holland 2002*
Oil on paper

top right: *Dordrecht II Holland 2002*
Oil on paper

middle: *Kamoto Farm 2002*
Oil on paper

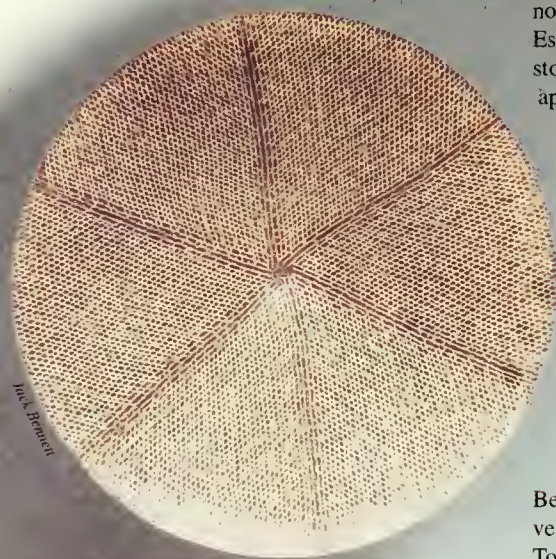
bottom: *Goromonzi 2002*
Oil on paper





June Stillwell

Art lovers and potters continue to relish the patterns and colours in bowls and vessels at Gallery Delta exhibitions. Amongst these are the characteristic works of Marjorie Wallace and Mutapo Pottery, now familiar but always exciting to viewers and collectors. Especially well known for their decoration, the hand-made stoneware and porcelain pieces of simple shapes have as much appeal for their artistic qualities as for their utility.

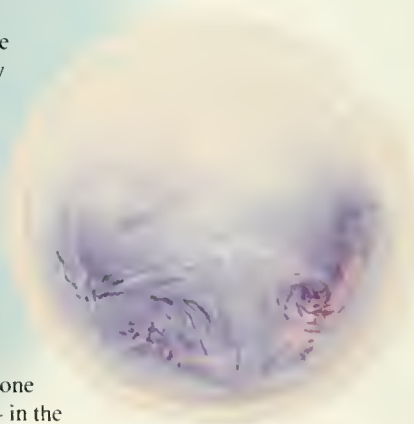


Lines and circles, geometric arrangements of infinite variety, cross-hatching, criss-crossings, chevrons, zigzags, all kinds of motifs are carefully brushed with oxides onto the surfaces of wheel-thrown forms, giving a distinctive African flavour, evoking the continent's long history of exquisite design. They are recognisable across the continent from symbols and signs in tattoos and marks, fabrics, costumes, carvings, beadwork, basketry, pottery, metalwork, ornamentation and artefacts, wall decorations and architecture. In the Mutapo pottery this patterning shows through and complements the glazing, which can vary from deep blue to soft yellow to strong pink.

Beautiful ware has always been created by women who handle vessels in their daily work of cooking, storing and home-making. Touching and seeing these utensils seems to stimulate the artistic sensibility, to lift the spirit and the heart in the everyday. In the hands of the talented, such as Marjorie, these activities could be the impulse for the sublime objects she creates with her team, those many sets and pieces, simple and quiet, showing lightness of touch, yet highly attractive with their pattern, rhythm and colour.

How does the Mutapo team keep up its extraordinary output of quality work, all of it individually hand-formed and embellished, always fresh and imaginative?

The first ingredient is discipline, in great measure, day after day, year after year. Everyone knows that this exacting art form requires it – in the



Myrtle Mullis

Jack Bennett begins an occasional series on Zimbabwean ceramists

Marjorie Wallace and the Mutapo Pottery

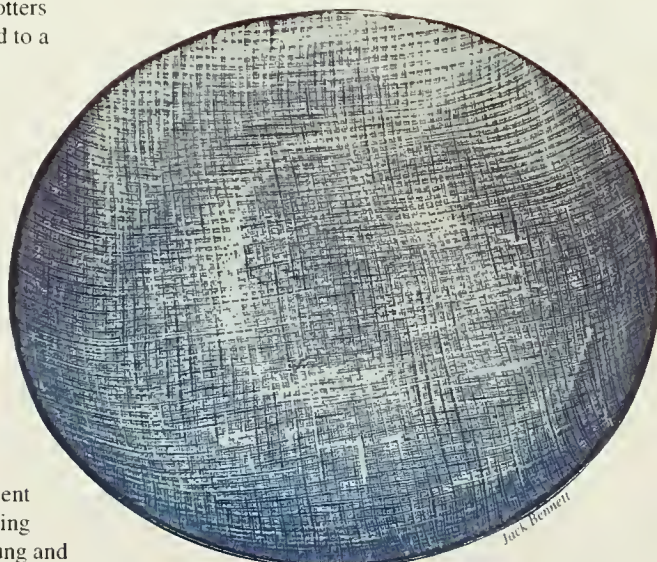
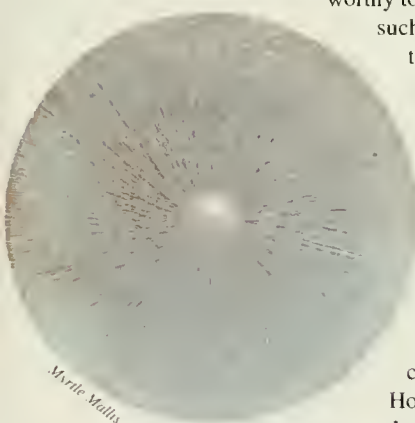
wedging, the throwing, the drying, the firing, the decorating, the glazing, and the re-firing, to mention only the essence of the cycle which turns the batches of clay into beautiful products. But for the professional potter, who has to enter exhibitions as well as meet orders, there is an extra premium on the process. Besides their regular invitations to show at Gallery Delta, Mutapo have constantly to supply local shops, as well as feed their outlets abroad, mainly in South Africa but also as far afield as England, Canada, Denmark, Belgium, Nigeria, Japan and Austria.

The second ingredient is artistry. This is essential in order to maintain creativity and also, perhaps, to disprove an old belief that this is just a craft, not worthy to rank with the arts – although any such doubts seem to have been dispelled by the recent burst of artistry in world ceramics.

Set among the boulders and lucky-bean trees of a Hatfield property in Harare, the Mutapo Pottery has a complement of three potters. Jimi Moyo makes up the clay bodies and the glazes, Jairos Zvagirai throws the clay on the wheel, and Marjorie Wallace does the decorating. All three were there at its beginning, in 1992, when Marjorie and the late Yael Hammar, an Israeli ceramist, bought a successful business from potters Howard and Maureen Minnie, who then returned to a newly independent South Africa.

Jimi Moyo had been trained by his brother, Private, who worked with the Minnies. Jairos had had three years' experience working as a production thrower. The pottery, now called Mutapo (meaning 'clay') would be run along the same lines as the Minnies had run it. Two years later it became open to participation by potters who were seriously interested in the discipline. Artists who have worked with the team include Berry Bickle, Margie Fries, Kevin Hough and Bev Sterling.

Marjorie was born in Bulawayo and was taught art at school by Josephine O'Farrell. She graduated in fine arts at Michaelis, the art school attached to the University of Cape Town, in 1978, and then returned to the imminently independent Zimbabwe. Many Zimbabweans of her age did the same, feeling positive about the future of the country; at the same time, young and talented South Africans were seeking asylum here and people of



other nationalities were coming to help too. It was a very interesting and exciting time, she says.

She met the potter Ros Byrne at this stage. Although she had majored in painting rather than ceramics, Marjorie had always loved seeing ceramic work. Ros Byrne let her help at her pottery once or twice a week and gave her an excellent grounding. At the same time Marjorie taught art at various government schools and ended her teaching career at Harare Polytechnic. By this time she had three small children and could feel a clash between raising a family and teaching. It was then that she bought the pottery business from the Minnies.

The Mutapo potters work with porcelain and stoneware clays. Originally both were fired in the same kiln – a low-fired porcelain and a high-fired stoneware – but now the two are fired separately whenever possible, as the results have been more successful this way.

The porcelain and stoneware bodies have the original recipes prescribed by Howard Minnie:

Porcelain: kaolin 45%; feldspar 25%; SiO_2 25%; bentonite 5%.
Stoneware: Gwaai clay 75%; Red Lawson clay 15%; fire-clay 10%.

The Kaolin comes from South Africa, and all of the other ingredients from A.I. Davies & Co in Harare. The porcelain is fired to Orton cone 9 and the stoneware to cone 8.

Decoration is made on the bisque-fired bodies, mostly with oxides obtained from South Africa through Moliware. The pots are then glazed with a transparent glaze made up from the recipe: feldspar 45%; kaolin 8%; ball clay 5%; dolomite 12%; SiO_2 15%; borosilicate frit 15%.

What and who inspire Marjorie and her team to keep up their punishing schedule and productivity? It is difficult to pin down this modest and shy person. One guesses that it has to do with the instinctive and mysterious impulse of artists.

She did, however, offer the following one-liners, which are only some of what she called 'quotes that have held me in good stead when I feel I can't go on.' These, she says, are some of the influences and inspirations that drive her. They can be read as advice to fellow potters, and may also serve as clues to what we are looking for in her own work:

Maureen Minnie: 'Lucie Rie, the English potter, would put an experiment in every kiln.'


Howard Minnie: 'Continual failure, continual curiosity.'

Mike White (Zimbabwean painter): 'However menial the task, always do your best.'

Kevin Hough: 'Always start with the hard part first.'

Mulberry Studio Pottery in South Africa (explaining their success): 'It's all just work.'

Josephine O'Farrell: 'In pottery, you make a pot.' ('I'm determined to prove her wrong!' adds Marjorie.)

Make of these what you will, but it is results that count, and Marjorie Wallace and her Mutapo team have results and excellence in abundance. 



Myrtle Mullis

Jairos Zvangirai



Courtesy of Mutapo Pottery



Jimmy Moyo

Courtesy of Mutapo Pottery



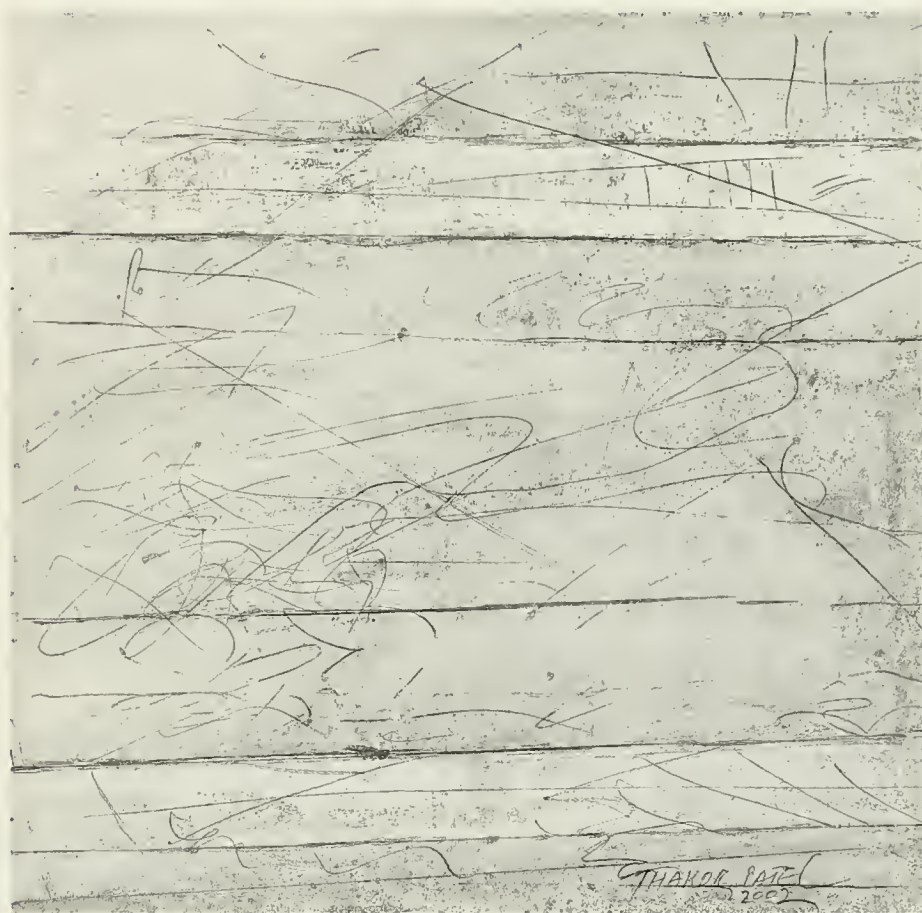
Myrtle Mullis



Marjorie Wallace

Courtesy of Mutapo Pottery

Thakor Patel at home



Thakor Patel's delicate drawings and colourful, abstract paintings are well known to art-lovers and gallery visitors in Harare. His work is widely collected, in Zimbabwe and beyond, and recent years have seen its reach extend to public and private buildings, as he collaborates with leading architects keen to incorporate fine art into their structural designs.

Less well known, however, is the man himself, who was born in India in 1932, and grew up in Sojitra, Gujarat. He spoke to *Gallery* magazine, and told us more.

When I was small, my father was in Malawi. He was a writer. He was a spiritual man. I don't know actually why he was in Malawi, but he stayed there for a few years before coming back. He was always talking about Africa; he loved it, I think. And that made me interested in Africa.

I studied in my native Sojitra up to twelve maybe, and after that I started to learn art in Ahmedabad. The one school was there, art school.

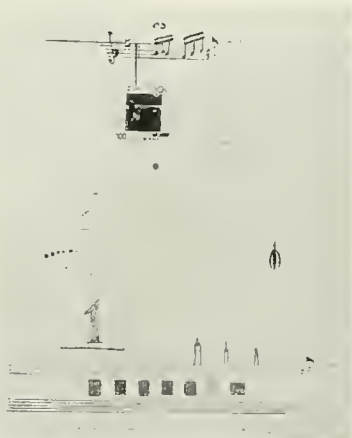
Was it common for boys to go away to school?

Well no, it was not common. Actually I was musician, I was very attached with music. Classical flute. And all night and day I used to play. So people used to tell me, 'You're a crazy guy!' A mad chap they called me. I was playing film songs. And after I came to Bombay I started to learn classical.

When you finished school, what did you do?

Then my uncle came to my native place, and he asked my mother, 'What you are doing about your son? He's a crazy guy, all the time playing music and nothing is doing, all night, day, he doesn't stay at home...' And so on. You know? 'He doesn't have time to come home, to come and eat and all ...' Like that. He said, 'Do you want to learn something?'

One of my friends, Jeran Patel, he used to come also. He was studying in Bombay, art, and he used to come in the vacation. He used to listen to my flute, all the time, night, ten o'clock, one o'clock, two o'clock, when I was playing. I sit here, he sit there, always listening. One day he asked me, 'Thakor, why don't you



top: *Black Line* 2002
Mixed media

right: *Birthday with Music* 1996
Ink, collage and paint

Courtesy of Thakor Patel

learn art?' You know? I said, I don't know about art. I was very bad in the school days, in art. An art teacher also told me, 'You cannot learn art.' The whole class was laughing because I am lame, and I was very bad student in art.

What effect did your lameness have?

Well, in those days, I mean school days, because you are really handicapped, people laughed. You know? So people sometimes laughed about me. And I was a dull student also, a very dull student, in art or whatever. Some subjects I was good, but some also very bad. So really I had a feeling I am very



June Stilwell

bad in education, all the time. Society always gave me so much pressure, pressure not to expose anything, not to say anything is right or wrong.

Pressure was on the family also because they were poor. When my father came back to India, he distributed all the money – whatever he earned from Africa, or whatever he had, he distributed to the poor people, because he was a spiritual man.

So when your friend Jeran Patel was sitting there, suggesting to you that you might study art, what were you thinking of doing next if he hadn't made that suggestion?

I didn't know what to do, actually. In those times I didn't have any depth to understand anything. Jeran Patel says, 'Why don't you study art?' I said, I don't know about that. He said, 'No, I will take you to Bombay. First you go to Ahmedabad; when you have studied first year, maybe second year, then I will take you to Bombay.'

When I was studying at the Fine Art College in Ahmedabad, my teacher said, 'Why don't you be an art teacher?' And I need a job because I need money and so on, and I thought, Let me go into the art teacher line. So I had an interview. When they saw me, and I am handicapped, they said, 'Thakor, you cannot be an art teacher, because you

are handicapped; if you teach, people might laugh.'

Even in my schooldays also, the art teacher told me, 'You cannot be an artist.' So that made me very burning inside. And I decided myself that one day I must learn art, I must be a painter, whatever did happen. Like a stubborn, you know?

Had you told Jeran Patel this?

No. He didn't know. I didn't tell him also. Because it is not my nature to tell whatever I feel, whatever happens. So, when he comes for vacation, he takes me to make a landscape in a hot day, you know? He was studying art in Bombay, Sir J.J. School of Art. So, he used to bring me a colour box, and paper and all he used to give me. And he said, 'When I come next after six months you must store the sketches.' I started to do a little bit of sketching, figurative work. And then I started a little bit to draw the nature side. I was very attached with nature because I used to play music. I was very attached to the night, to the moonlight. It speaks something to me. You know what I mean?

So I studied for two years in Ahmedabad, first year and second year. Then Jeran said, 'Now you can come to Bombay.' So he took me to Bombay. To Sir J.J. School of Art. There are 25 students doing interviews for admission. Out of that only they can take three students. And I got first class in the interview out of all, and in the practical drawing. Then they call me up: 'You cannot get admission because you have not passed matric...' And immediately – that time my mind was a very fast worker – I told them, If you get me admission, I am going to continue my study and I will get my matric.

And then they pointed out, 'Mr Patel, you cannot do the murals on the wall...' I told the Dean, I can climb a tree – even with one leg. I don't have problem. From childhood I used to play cricket, and I used to climb up a ladder. So I don't have problem with myself. I could do murals if I could learn hard. I can show you how I climb the ladder, so you can ... And then they said, 'Oh, this guy is...'

'Serious?'

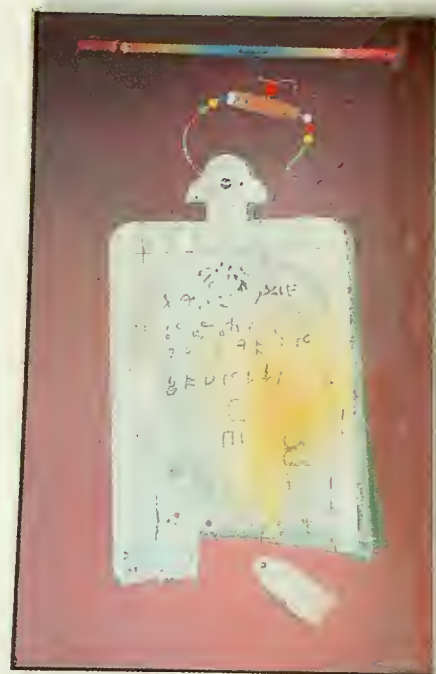
Yes. 'Specially', they mention. 'Specially Admitted.' In red ink, which they mark with.

Had you been to Bombay before?

No. That was my first time.

It's a big place, Bombay.

Big place! I got lost. I had the address of my uncle, Babubhai – my mother's brother's son. It was near the airport. But I didn't write to him or anything. It was difficult to find out, but I was asking from people,



top *Skin* 1995
Mixed media



above *Slate* 1985
Mixed media

Where is the Santa Cruz? Where is the Santa Cruz? So there I was with my small suitcase, sitting in the electric train and asking where is the Santa Cruz. They tell me, there is the station. In my language, so it was easy to talk. So they said, 'Yes, this is the Santa Cruz.' I give the address to the taxi man, This is the address, and so on. He took me there, a little bit round, round and round, as they do, and I got there, and they were happy also, happy to see me. And then I stayed there; every day I had to go from Santa Cruz to Bombay to the School of Art. Babubhai made me like his son, or brother, and helped me a lot for the education, to push me, otherwise I couldn't make it.

So how long did you spend at the art school in Bombay?

Five years. Commercial art four years, and fine art five years. I passed first-class, and then I was awarded a scholarship, a fellowship, for teaching fine arts to fifth-year diploma students. So I was teaching diploma students. In those times, when you learn fine art you don't get a job. So you learn side by side commercial art also, so you get a job also if you can. So I got first class in commercial art also. And I was a most brilliant student at both in the college. I should not say myself up, but let me tell you.

You'd had that feeling when you were a boy at school, that burning desire to do something. Was it as exciting as you expected, to be painting and drawing?

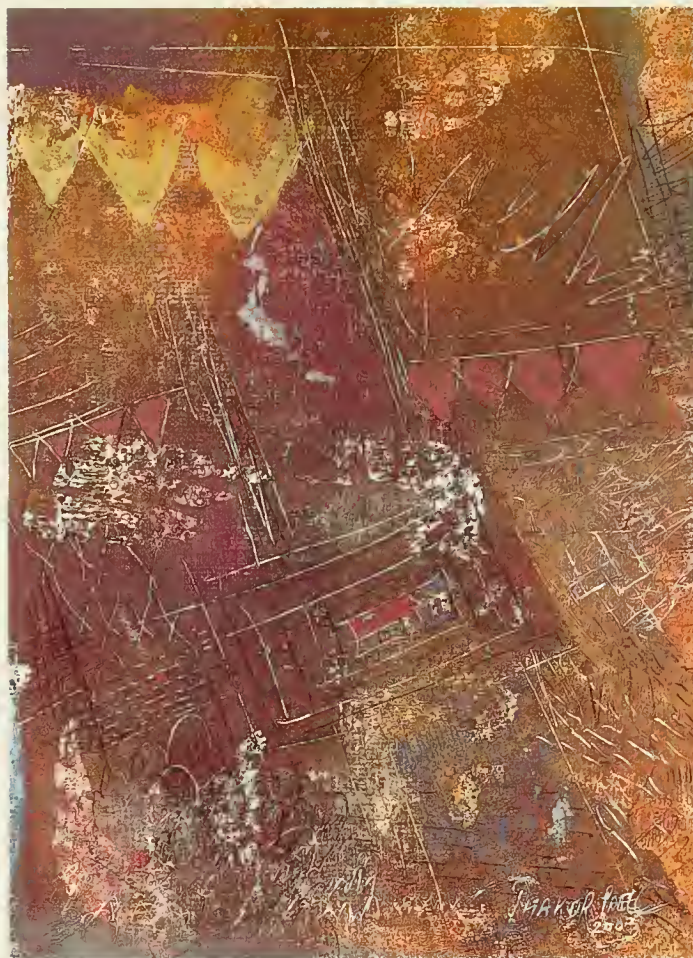
I was excited at beginning to draw, and then later on, you know, when you feel happy to do something, you like to do some more and more work on different things. Jeran was appreciating all the time. He was pushing me, which was so good. I can tell you. He was in fourth year when I was in third year. And he was also passed first-class and he got a fellowship. And both come from the same town, same village. And also, funny thing also, he married with my elder brother's wife's sister. Funny thing, yes?

I was walking at night and a lady met me, an old lady, and we were walking together and she said, 'What are you doing?' I said, I learn and now I am looking for a job. Coincidences happen – every time coincidences happen to me. She said, 'Did you study art?' I said, Yes, I studied art. Commercial art and fine art. 'So are you interested to work from that?' I said, Yes, I realise to work I need a job. And then she gave me the address, telephone numbers and all, and said, 'Call me and come to my place.' It was an advertising agency. And she was knowing the top man. I made appointment and I went there to see them. 'Mr Patel, if you want a job, we will do the test, illustrations for a story.' And so they gave me a story ... I asked someone to read and tell me what is happening in the story,

because it was difficult for me to read English also.

But I didn't work for them, there were always complications. When you do something, you have to show the rough sketch. When you colour, they say, 'No, change this colour, we don't like this, we don't like that,' and it is very tough, you know? Make me sick, that. So I decided I don't want to do commercial art now. Let me work in the fine art. I read in the newspaper they need a textile designer in a big government department. So I applied for the job and out of 25 they selected me. Pupul Jayakar interviewed me; she created the whole handloom handicraft industry in the country, and was a good friend of Indira Gandhi.

And they selected me. I didn't know anything about any textile, nothing. They want only painter. I was selected and they asked me, 'Will you go to go any part of India?' I said, Yes, and Pupul Jayakar asked me, 'Will you travel?' I say, Yes, madam, I can travel anywhere. I like travelling very much. So they sent me to Calcutta first. One month I worked there. Calcutta was very crowded. I was living in a hotel, and travelling was very difficult by bus because the crowd, because of the leg. You can't believe it! The second day they tore my shirt, and I couldn't catch the bus. My boss was very nice to me, and I went to Bombay for a training for three months. The director



Entrance 2003, Mixed media

there, Mr Mahante, his daughter was handicapped, so he understood about my difficulty, and he made me a transfer there. One month Calcutta. Then Bombay two years. After that I got married. And after I got married they transferred me to Benares.

How did the marriage come about?

After college I went home and somebody asked me, 'Thakor, would you like to marry?' I said, First thing, I don't mind to get married, but only if the girl agree – because I am handicapped – and if she agree, then I will get married. I must be clear with her that I am handicapped.

Did you know her?

No. I didn't know her.

Then they asked me to come in a different city, to see her. I went there. We met. I talked to her – Does it interfere that I am handicapped, that I studied art and so on? I questioned her, you know, asking if there was pressure or not, from her parents, and she said, 'No, I am happy to marry with you, I like you,' and so on. And then I told her, If you like to get married, then I will marry. But any time you get pressure, from anyone, you tell me. And then I got married.

So she didn't come from your home area; did your parents know each other?

No. But they have certain kind of status, you know? My wife is in a royal family; and my own family – though I should not say like that – also has a very high status: my grandfather's brother was the adviser of the king, of the rajah. I was not interested about the background, though. You know what I mean? Because I live in Bombay, so I know what is life. I should not stick with just one thing, with one community or whatever.

So I told to them, I would like to have very simple marriage. I don't want to spend money, because we didn't have money also to spend. But we must have five people. Otherwise we can't get married.

My wife, myself, and one friend I had. So I phoned to my brother, where I was staying. I said, Babubhai, I am getting married, right now, and they ask me to have five people to bring. And he said, 'You are getting married? You didn't tell us!' So he brought some people, two, three people, so we are five people, and I got married.

I was working in Bombay. Then I got transferred to Benares. From Benares to Bombay again. From Bombay to Bangalore I got transferred. Again I came to Bombay. Again they transfer me Meerut, near Delhi. And again they transfer me Bombay. That is a very funny thing. Once you get transferred from Bombay you never come back to Bombay. Never throughout life. But Mrs Pupul Jayakar would like me very much. I

textiles?

Different work we would do. Export products for the market we have to do. Foreigners come there. American, Japanese, French or British, all sort of people come there. They bring the sample, and they want us to design, with new colour, new patterns.

And while you were doing this, you were also doing your own painting?

All the time. All the time. Exhibiting. Leave the office, go home, paint at home. I was a landscape painter.

In Bombay?

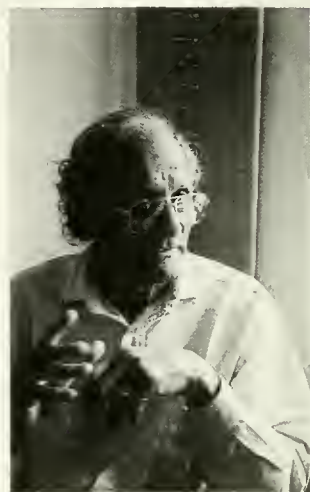
You know Bombay? At night, Jeran comes to my place and says, 'Thakor, come on, we will go for landscape.' I would say, What? Now? It's two o'clock at night! 'Come on, we'll go.' So I used to pack the colour, the paint-box, and me and Jeran would go walking to the long-distance taxi, and go to Nullabar Hill. We sit on the top of the hill and we paint in the night. Beautiful landscape painting we used to do. Moonlight, the Bombay night, and so on.

And what were living conditions like? You were with your wife now, in Bombay, back and forth to Benares and Bangalore. Did you start a family?

Well, I start a family. My son got born in

When did America happen?

Oh yes. I was exhibiting my work in Bangalore, and a visitor comes there, a foreigner. He saw my work in an exhibition, and I didn't know who it was. So one day I got a phone call. 'Mr Patel, I would like to see your work.' And I was very shy, because



Jane Sibbwell

I understood some Englishman is speaking American, you know? I had a very small house: it was difficult to take Americans to that house, so I said, I can bring paintings to my office. He came to see my work, and he liked it very much, and he said, 'Thakor, I would like to buy this one.' I said, OK, take it. When he took it he said to me, 'Thakor, I don't have money ... I mean, I don't have money to pay you now. But I can send to you from America – tonight I am leaving.' I said, I did not ask you money. I did not ask you money – if you hang the painting in your bedroom, dining-room, kitchen, I will be very happy.

Then he said, 'Thakor, you want anything?' I said, No. I don't want anything. Everything available here, so I don't need. Not to hurt him, I said, OK, I need three tubes, oil colours – vermilion, ultramarine, and lemon yellow. Please, if you can make three tubes, I would be very happy. After that, within one month he sent me two boxes, a lot of paint, one for me and one for my neighbour who was working with me.

So you got the paints...

Yes. And I made a group of painters, to have a group show. I was the first man in Bangalore to make a group. We had four artists made a group, exhibiting every time. I made also nude drawings, a lot of nude drawings, but out of question to exhibit because people are shy, people get scared.

Was it easy to get exhibitions in India?

No, it is very difficult, it takes long time, very long time, you know. We had to book about five years before. Now it is ten years,



don't know why. Because of my work? Because I was very good in textiles? Maybe for this, or any reason.

Benares, 1963 or so. And after that, one daughter born in Bombay, when I was in America. That's a long story also. And then the third-born. Two born in Bombay, one in Benares.

You spent all these years working with the company, until 1980. You were designing

ten to fifteen years. I didn't have any one-man show in India, only the group show.

Let's go back to the man who sent you the boxes of paint...

After six months again, he came to India, to Bangalore. I was doing the textiles, and he liked the scarf which I was painting in those times and said he would like to buy it. And then he said, 'One day, Thakor, I am going to call you in America.' And after six months he sent me invitation. He made programme for me. He sent me a ticket. But my colleagues were jealous, they didn't want me to go, and tried to stop the passport. Coincidentally Pupul Jayakar came to the office, in Bangalore, to see all the artists' work, and I told her my problem. And she said, 'OK, Mr Patel, let me go to Delhi.'

Later I also went to Delhi, and I went to the secretary, where the permission was coming from. And they said, 'Are you Mr Patel?' I said, Yes. 'You are coming for the permission?' Yes. 'You got it. Permission from Indira Gandhi.' Pupul Jayakar has made it, special permission from Gandhi!

And Pupul Jayakar had no trouble about you taking a leave of absence?

No, I had a six month leave. Because she liked me so much. Not as a person, but because of the work. She gives all artists the freedom. She fights for the artists. Any artist.

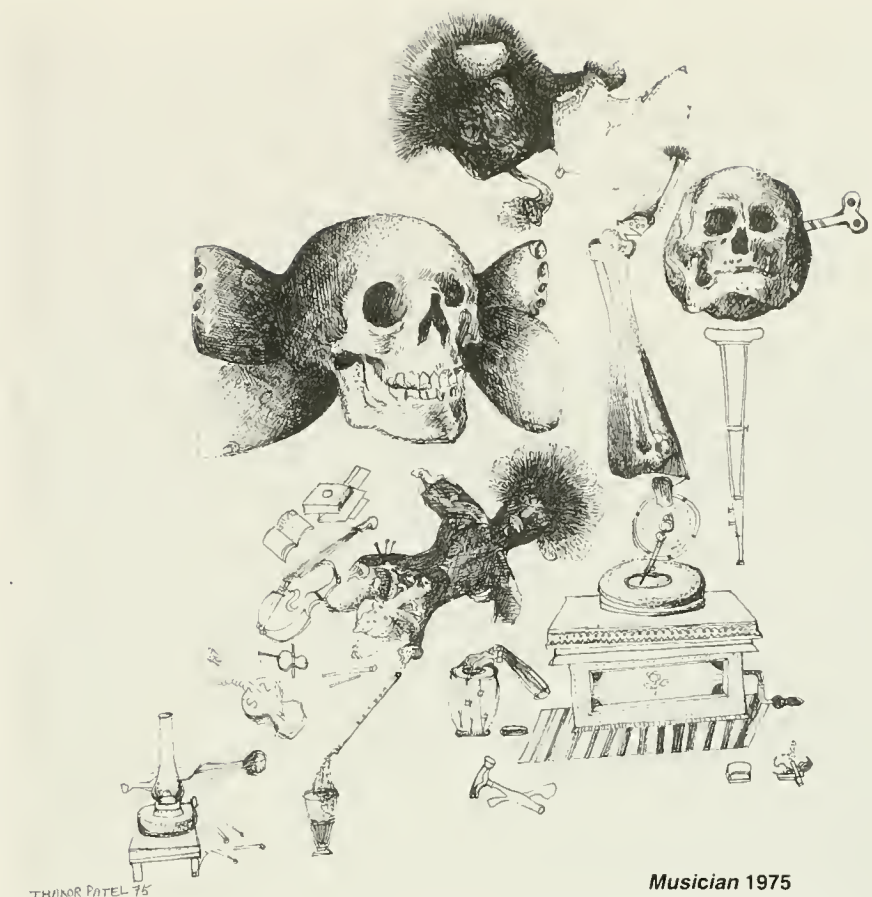
So you went to America. Where did you go?

Austin, Texas. Dr Robert Mayfield was the chairman of the geography department. I stayed with him about six months. I exhibited a lot of work, sold also. About six one-man shows I did. In Dallas, Austin, Fort Worth, other places.

And they had a gallery in Dallas. The person running it was losing the business, so I helped run the gallery also. And when I was there, it worked very well. I don't know why. Maybe the stars. Mayfield said, 'Thakor, when you are here, people buy. What's wrong with this other guy?' He gave the notice immediately to him. Fired him. I said, How can you do like that. Mayfield? You don't get to give one month notice? He laughed, 'Thakor, this is not India!'

You went back to India, and stayed there for the next ten years, working in the textile business. When and why did you decide to come to Zimbabwe?

One of my relatives, my mother's father's son, who is here for many years, came to India to see me. I was in Meerut. He asked me, 'Thakor, would you like to come to Zimbabwe?' I mean, those times called Rhodesia. So I said, Yes, I like to travel. And he said, 'OK, I will call you one day.' So he



Musician 1975
Black ink on paper

sent me invitations, to see the Independence. Again my passport was stopped, but I got it, and came here, after Independence.

By yourself, or with your family?

Oh no, with myself. My family came after one year.

You were interviewed for a job with a local textile company, but the work was simply copying samples, and tracing...

It made me shocked, you know? Tracing all the time! I said, I am a creative man, and all the time tracing, it is not possible. I said, Thank you very much, and I came out.

For the next three or four years he worked at a family-owned print-shop.

When I came in the country, here, I was visiting first to the National Gallery. And I saw the sculpture, John Takawira, Bernard Takawira, and a lot of others. It was beautiful sculpture, and I said, Ah, this is my place now! I met Carol Wales-Smith in the Gallery. I told her I am a painter, that I would like to exhibit my work, and I don't know anyone here in this country. With her help, I booked a gallery, John Boyne, and exhibited. Her friends came – Helen [Lieros], Babette [Fitzgerald], all interesting people came. As well Peter and Margaret Garlake, Gillian Wylie, Barbara Murray. Generally, people didn't like. Why? I said, I questioned why people didn't like. Someone said, 'Thakor, because of the war here;

people don't like to see skulls on the wall...'

Why had you drawn skulls?

Well, when I was living in Meerut, somebody came one night-time with a gun; they break the doors, they tie people to the bed, they kill people. And they rob everything. People shout everywhere. I saw some of things. I felt very bad inside, and I should not keep it inside. For whatever it is, bad or good, I must express what I feel. And that's what I made.

And after that I needed money a little more, to send for tickets for my family and so on. Christopher Till [then Director of the National Gallery] asked me to teach in the Polytechnic, and I got a job, a part-time job. There I met Pip Curling, and Di Deudney, Iain Lamond also, he helped with a big studio when I prepared for one-man show at the National Gallery. Such helpful people!

How did your wife and children feel about coming to Zimbabwe?

When they come first they were very happy, because of the different environment and so on, but after that socially for my wife it was a little bit more difficult, so she was very nervous also. She is happy here, but social life is very different.

How long had you planned to stay?

I didn't plan to stay.

You didn't plan to stay?

No. I didn't plan to stay. But because of this sculpture – it made me happy. Because I am a painter. I like different things. I had made small drawings, small Christmas cards, and I ran to Moffat Street and went around showing the cards, asking, Would you like to buy?

What, in the streets?

Yes. What to do? Well! So when I went to a shop, and they said, 'How much?' I said, Fifty cents. 'Ah, fifty cents, no, no, no – go, go.' As if I am a beggar, you know? So it hurt me again, but I didn't keep in my heart anything. Anyway, so I walk, walk, walk, walk, walk. I saw the Delta Gallery board, in Manica Road. Gallery? I can't see here a gallery. I asked the next shop, Where is the gallery? And they said, 'Go inside'.

So I went inside. Helen was on the corner table, at the entrance, you know. I saw the paintings, Babette Fitzgerald, Berry Bickle, Helen, Henry Thompson, and so on. I felt, Ah, this is my place now, I have found it. Now I will stay here. Now I will be here, I said. I don't want to go back. You know? Artistic value which I wanted to feel, and I found it. Quite a different work from what I saw in the National Gallery. So, slowly, slowly I went to the gallery, to Helen, and I introduced myself. It's beautiful work here at the gallery, I said, beautiful gallery. 'Where are you from?' she asks. I said, I am from Bombay. I am a painter, I am here for a few months, about six months I am here, and I would like to show you some work. I showed her and she said, 'Ah, Thakor, would you like to exhibit beautiful works?' I will be very happy, I said. I don't have money, I said, so I will be very happy to exhibit. 'OK, leave it here.'

I leave it, ten cards I leave. The exhibition was coming within fifteen days. She phoned me, 'Thakor, what about framing?' I said, I don't have money to frame anything. I don't have single cent. 'What about prices?' I said, You put whatever you want for it. 'OK.' She framed it within a week or fifteen days. The exhibition was. She asked me to come. Opening day, all the drawings, they sell, all of them. The whole lot. Ten drawings. Instead of fifty cents, she sold for twenty-five dollars! And then I got the money. Immediately I got some paper, paint, brush, and start painting a little bigger one. Next time I go, I put at thirty-five dollars. Three drawings I exhibit, three gone. Bigger ones, seventy-five. Big ones, gone. Hundred, hundred and twenty-five, like that, every time selling them. And that way I started my little bit work in this country.

The small drawings you were talking about, that you took first to Delta – what sort of drawings were they?



Cards 1980
Gold and black ink and paint on paper



Only the birds.

Birds?

Drawings of birds. Beautiful lines, like Klee, line drawings.

And as your drawings got bigger, did you draw different things?

In India I used to do different things, but here I need money, you know? When I came here, I saw a lot of birds. Beautiful birds.

What was it like, coming from a big, crowded place like Bombay?

Very different here.

Did you also feel any prejudice from people, because you were Asian? Or from other Indians because you arrived later than they did?

Now, that's a very good point, I can say. The Rhodesians, we can say English people, or white, or whatever, they are so kind to me. I cannot forget any who have helped me in this country. And they are so generous, people I have never met like that. Never, never, never. My experience was so good, otherwise I couldn't have come out as a painter. You know? Helen, Babette, Carol, Peter Jackson, their friends, their group, Richard Jack, Fried Lutz. And at American library, Stephen Mushonga was very helpful with art books. Now we add Victor Utria, Jack Cohen, then Sarah Pollack, all of these people ...

...all of these people are lovers of art.

Lovers of art, yes, exactly.

And my guess is, that when they think of Thakor Patel, the first thing they think of is Thakor the artist; they don't think Thakor the man from Bombay.

I am twenty-one years here. Up to now, this year, last year I can say, up to now very few have bought my work in this country, hardly a single Indian. Because they are interested in business and money. One of them said, 'Artists are always beggars.'

He said that?

Yes. He said that. And it made me so angry, so angry I cannot express my anything. What does it mean, artists are beggars? Because I did not have money? Most of artists are poor. Artists are always poor. Very few are rich people; mostly, artists, musicians, dancers, they are not rich people. And that's why people get creative people, they create something. And that is God's gift, creating is God's gift.

Do you think that being poor stimulates that creativity somehow?

You know, I have no answer for that.

What did your family think when you came here? Did they expect that you would come here to make money, that you would stop being a painter?

They think I will make money here.

They didn't think that you would become an artist here?

No. No. No.

Do you think that you would have become the same artist that you are now if you had stayed in Bombay?

Well, it might be difficult there to work, to have a one-man show or whatever. It might be difficult; it might be successful also. But I got a chance to do more creative work more here, also.

Looking out of your window now, it's very quiet and peaceful; we can see more trees than we can see buildings.

That gives me inspiration – the trees, and the cloud, and the space.

And the birds. How did you move on from there, from the bird drawings?

Then I started to do small landscapes. In between landscape and modern. And I knew what people appreciate here, also. Because when I saw this different kind of work in the Delta Gallery, and sold some work, so I can understand what people appreciate.



Torso 1995
Mixed media

But you also mentioned earlier going into the National Gallery and seeing other sorts of paintings...

Wildlife in oils, yes. Not my taste. You know, really I try to bring different images here, when I exhibit work. And also it's a question all the time whether I should do African theme or the modern work alone. And my heart says, Don't bother anything. And already at night when I sleep, I question all the time whether I should do African, or what, you know?

When you say 'African or what', is the 'what' the paintings we see on the walls around us in your flat here?

It's inspiration from Africa. It's coming from my heart. I don't think what I want to do.

And you certainly don't think it must be somehow African or somehow Indian?

When I work, on the wall or whatever, when I see on the wall some scratch or some cracked tiles, or whatever the thing which I see, I utilise it in my own way. A form, shape, space, or whatever.

So to that extent the environment here is speaking through you, but not in terms of your painting an 'African' painting.

Remember, I had one-man show, about thirty paintings [Gallery Delta, 1993]. I never got chance to work on sculpture in India. After coming here, I do a lot of painting of sculpture. I pick up from Africa. I can now do my own way sculpture – on the painting I can do three dimensions.

Do you ever look back over the twenty-one years you've been here, and feel you made the wrong decision?

I don't know whether it was right or wrong. [laughs] I am a painter. I don't think it's the wrong decision, no. I don't think so. Because I got more freedom to work here. Instead of seeing one thing, I can see many,



many things. And I travel all over the world, to America, Europe, Japan, to many places, you know? I visit a lot of museums also, so it open my mind instead of staying in the one square. It open my mind to what is going on and where I should stand in the art world. You know what I mean? Here I got chance to create different art. If I am in India, I couldn't have created this sort of work. I might have a different, Indian, way of doing.

So there's a sense in which India would have pressured you a little bit to be Indian, whereas here you are open to be anything you want?

Yes. In India also freedom is there, but the environment make you create different things.

And when you visited France, Germany, America, Japan, have you ever thought, 'Maybe I could live here for a few years'?

Ohh...[laughs] I don't know. How I came here, and how my luck brought me here, I don't know.

Could it have been somewhere else? What if you'd had a cousin in Toronto, or Manchester?

Maybe. Maybe. Because Mayfield told me

right: **Collage 1996**
Mixed media

below: **Sculpture 1995**
Mixed media



Courtesy of Thakur Patel

to stay there, in America. As a painter, to live. He said, 'Thakor, you must live in America.' And if I could have got a chance there, I could have stayed there, but luck couldn't keep me there. So I don't know whether I could have stayed or not there.

So it is luck?

Maybe. [laughs] God knows. Whatever we speak, whatever I say, before I am saying it, God knows what I am going to say.

Was your family religious when you were a boy, when you were growing up?

Yes. My father was very spiritual. I used to go to the temple, yes, regularly I used to go. But now, after getting understanding, I don't go temple; and even if I go to any temple, church, Muslim or any, I go everywhere. My wife is social, so I joined in some time, but for me I am not a social man actually – because of my background, the pressure in my childhood. So much pressure they gave me, I couldn't be a free man with anything. I got frightened all the time, inside myself.

How much of that fear, that not being free, goes back to the accident? Do you think that has a lot to do with your leg?

No. That time I was very small. I was seven years. For three years they couldn't do anything because there was no good doctor in the small town. Later on, in the big city, they had to amputate. First they cut it here, and the doctor said, 'No, still it's rotten inside,' so they cut a second time.

That obviously had an effect at various stages of your life. For example, people said that because of your handicap you couldn't paint murals.

But to me, I don't feel I don't have a leg. To me. People say, 'Why don't you make artificial leg?' I made it three times, a leg, but it speak to me, my heart: it's not right for me, as a painter. Whatever you are, you are. You know? So I don't use any artificial leg.

But you talk about this fear in childhood. You were shy as a boy?

Yes. Even still I am shy, still I am shy. I get so nervous. I get nervous inside, you know? Then I don't know what to talk about, what topic. And because this whole background of childhood affected me so much, I don't want to give it my children also. So let them be free, whether they make a mistake or not. Let them fall from here [indicates the window of the apartment]. It doesn't matter. I should not say, Don't jump! Let them fall. Let them experience. When the children cut their fingers, they understand the knife.

Myself, I like to live in a very simple way. This is inside me, all the time. Whether I have money or not. My heart doesn't say, Live luxuriously. Simple things I like very much – what do you call it? – a charming life. I can say, a charming life is simply the best.

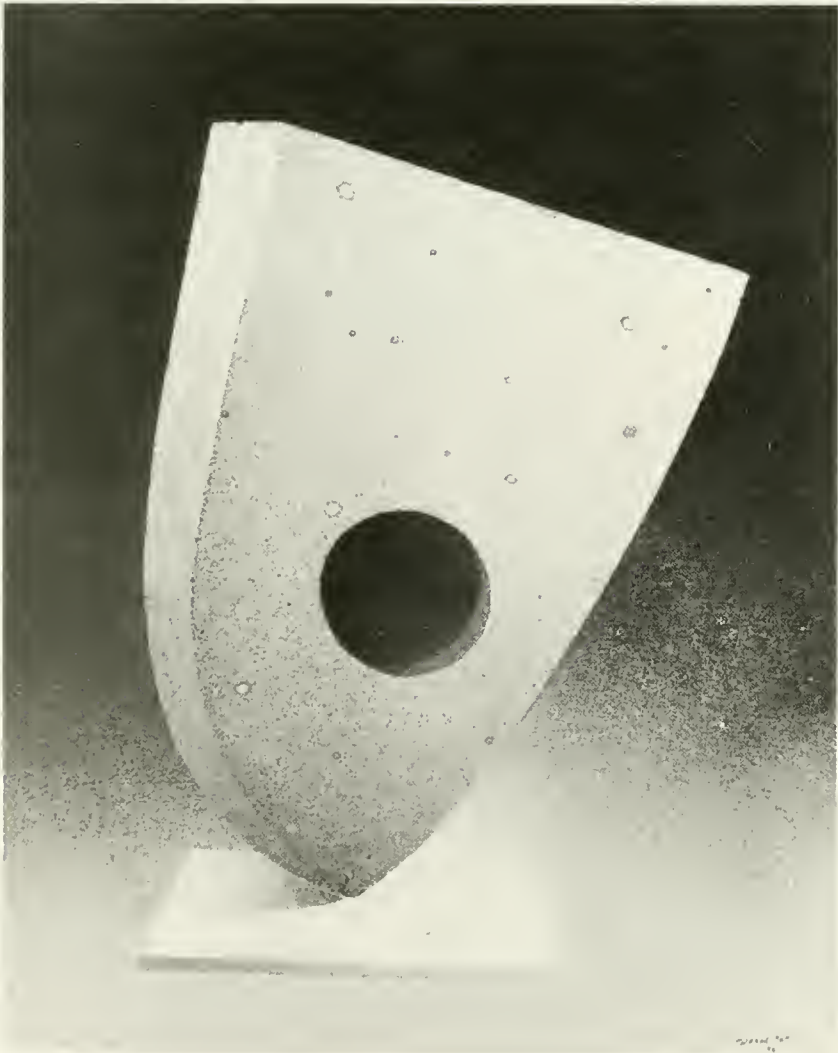
I was a very different child in my whole family. Very different. Everybody was business people, and I hate that.

But your father wasn't a business people. What did he think of them?

No, my father wasn't a business people. What did he think? I don't know, because he kept twenty-five years mum. For twenty-five years he didn't speak to anyone. Stopped talking. No word. Nothing. Only he can write on the paper, what he wants to say. And people tell that he's a mad chap.

And then you were the next mad chap...?

Ah well! [laughs]



Danielle Dendrey

The story of Matekenya's Pole

A tall, carved wooden pole stands vertically against a backdrop of green trees. The pole is decorated with various carvings, including a large sun-like figure at the top with many thin, radiating arms. A person wearing a green cap and a green shirt is visible at the base of the pole, looking up at it. The pole is made of a single piece of wood, with various carvings and decorations along its length.

Saturday, 4th May, 2002

Today was the day of Matekenya's pole and its erection. This day had been set aside and destined for the installation. It is Megalo Savvato in the Orthodox calendar. Helen refused to teach her usual class this day and so the gallery and its surrounds were devoid of twenty or thirty young people, and the parking area and the street were free of cars. Richard Witikani and his team were working on the end of the verandah, framing the last works for his exhibition on Tuesday next but otherwise the space was unimpeded and ready for the great moment. Yet at ten o'clock I did not know for sure that it would happen. Matekenya had not called, or signalled or telephoned. I was beginning to loose faith and to swear.

This story commenced in 1997, when Jacquie Carstairs, having observed that Crispin Matekenya was a man of unusual talent with wood sculpture – after the Blakiston School Project of 1996 (see *Gallery No 10*, December 1996) – commissioned him to make a totem pole to set off her Zuwa Weaving Centre in the garden of her home in Emerald Hill. A sum was agreed, including transport and installation costs. Jacquie did not know what she was to get nor did she know how soon the work would be delivered. She was to tell me recently: 'After only about two weeks Matekenya arrived with a fourteen-metre carved tree trunk on the back of a long lorry, and about thirty men, and digging a pit, installed it in my garden.' It has stood there ever since. Jacquie, sadly finding it necessary under the adverse political and economic situation to quit the country for Australia, where she was born, and selling up home and effects, decided to donate the work to Gallery Delta, in recompense 'for all the exhibition nights and wine over the past twenty-seven years.' This sounded well and good. But the responsibility for the removal and costs, of course, was mine. When I re-examined the pole in Jacquie's garden I was in awe and more than a little trepidation. I was worried about dropping the pole, let alone the removal and installation. I summoned Matekenya. He agreed, thank God, to supervise and undertake the removal of the pole to the gallery. Within a few days he and his men had dug around and dropped it. It looked even more enormous than before, now that the two metres that had been in the ground was also exposed, and it weighed about three tons, probably more.

Derek Huggins consults
his diary for the record
of a unique happening

Soon after. I selected a position in the gallery garden and Matekenya's men, and mine, dug a hole about two metres deep and hacked out a slanting trench, like a chute, into the pit. We decided to abide for a week until Saturday, 4th May. In the meantime, I thought much about how the removal and installation would proceed and about every eventuality that might occur. In my optimistic moments I could see it going up and standing erect without a problem. In the early hours of the morning, doubts and fears about the endeavour inevitably entered my mind. I enquired of my friend, Keith Viewing, a sailor of renown, about ropes and pulleys, blocks and tackles, and he investigated cranes and jibs with his mining contacts. The outcome was, for varying reasons, a manual job with the aid of some ropes around convenient trees. Keith would lend me his ropes with a three or four ton breaking strain. I felt a little happier. I reckoned that if it were possible to load the pole on a vehicle, then we would drop it outside the gate, drag it on log rollers across the parking space and introduce the bole into the chute of the pit, rope it across the jacaranda and around the wild palms and pull it up and hold it steady while the pit was filled. If it went out of control and canted, I thought it likely that the base would remain in the pit and would not fall unless along the line of the chute. But the dilemma remained.

Matekenya phoned at ten o'clock and asked if he should proceed with the plan to go to Mbare, hire labour and a vehicle and collect the pole. I said 'Yes.' I reckoned he would need three hours. I phoned Keith and asked him to come with the ropes at one o'clock. I went to the bank to draw cash.

They arrived at half past twelve. A long lorry with the top of the pole protruding beyond the rear with Matekenya and about thirty men aboard who were all shouting at once. They jumped off the lorry and swarmed into the garden to look at the pit and then back to the entrance and then to the pit again. One of them came to me and said, 'I am a leader. Don't worry about the noise. This is a very heavy thing. We shall make a lot of noise. An extra *bonsera* for a beer afterwards.' I agreed. I went and phoned Keith to hurry along. By the time I returned to the garden the lorry had reversed through the gateway and the pole was being removed. The men ignored my rollers. Instead they had inserted stout poles underneath the totem as it came off the back of the lorry, and with two men on each side of the seven or eight poles, they walked the totem at waist height, staggering as they did so, and accompanied by much shouting, across the yard and laid the base over the chute.

I was flabbergasted. I applauded. Everybody applauded. There was much shaking of

hands and back-slapping. And much clamour. River sand and cement were mixed and went into the bottom of the pit. The swarming and the shouting did not stop as they figured the next stage of the manoeuvre. It seemed that options were aired by natural leaders and gradually dissenting voices were overpowered until there was a general consensus and everybody roared for action. So much energy. So much zeal. So much excitement. So much goodwill. I implored them to wait a few minutes until the arrival of Keith and the ropes. No. They wanted to get the job done quickly, to climb back aboard the lorry to Mbare and go to football and the beer-hall. I was ignored. The gang was intent on erecting the pole there and then. Matekenya assented. They heaved the pole into the chute. It now lay at about a twenty-degree angle. Then they seized the one thick and strong rope that I had and lashing it to the pole about two-thirds along its length, and with about twenty men at the other end, and the remainder of the gang around and under the pole, pulled and pushed.

Keith arrived at this moment, too late to help. He too watched spellbound. On only the second attempt, the pole lifted and the base fell into the bottom of the pit and then wavered and canted. It was a moment full of suspense. They too had calculated, and had been prepared to take the chance, that the pole would not fall out of the pit. It did not. It stood in the hole and leaned at an angle of about sixty degrees. The men ran in and blocked the chute with poles and logs. I breathed again. The call came again and again for *matombo* – rocks. I indicated the rockery. In a few minutes half the rockery had disappeared into the hole to pinion the base. And then with ropes and hands the pole was pushed and pulled until it was vertical. The remainder of the rockery was plundered and went down the hole. The pole stood erect, all twelve metres of it, above the ground. Wonderment and again much noisy happiness. The gang had done



Courtesy Mativiti



Courtesy Mativiti



Courtesy Mativiti



Courage Matavira

around it near the top. They wrestle the 'sun-head' up and on top of the pole where it balances precariously, before the final supreme effort to lift and lower it on a pin. Surprisingly, they manage. The pole is now resplendent with a yellow head, the sun, which an assortment of creatures – snakes and tree frogs and chameleons – aspire to reach in their ascent of the pole. The work is completed by the installation, at the bottom, of a carved wooden crocodile for use as a bench. ☞

their job. Paid one by one they ran for the vehicle and, singing as they went, were gone by half past one. Unbelievable. I was relieved and delighted, and cared not for the cost.

Meanwhile, Matekenya's team mixed more concrete and threw it down the pit. Fried Lutz, who had witnessed the whole event, and Keith and I sat on the verandah and talked over a coffee with incredulity at the marvellous happening and unique installation of Matekenya's pole – the best I have ever seen in forty-three years in Africa. And when we examined the pole in situ, Keith said it was not absolutely perpendicular. Charles Nyamatemba, the builder, agreed. I thought about Aeroplane, the handyman about home and the gallery, who having been asked to lay out some vegetable patches in a straight and regular fashion, had received criticism from me that they were not parallel, not straight. His retort was: 'You come from England. Let England do as England does. This is Africa. That is straight.' I laughed and said no more. I said to Keith: 'This is Africa. The pole is straight. And if it is not quite so, this is Africa, and so what?' Keith will make a ceramic plaque to commemorate Matekenya and his pole. There remains, until another day when the concrete has set, for the head to go on the pole. That will be the sequel to the tale.

Saturday, 11th May, 2002

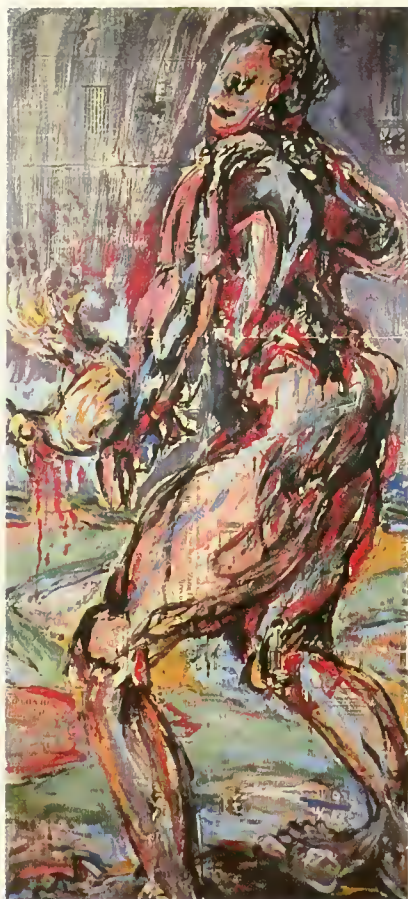
Crispen Matekenya and his assistants arrived this morning with the 'sun-head' that will top the pole. It is round and of solid gum and is spiked with shafts to represent the rays. It is heavy. The rope is thrown over a convenient fork in the jacaranda tree nearby. Clifford Chipunza scales the pole to the top and makes it look easy. He drives in a couple of nails as guides for the rope to which the 'sun' is tied and then it is hoisted aloft up the side of the pole where it hangs while the next move is considered. Clifford and his friend climb the pole and rope themselves



Courage Matavira



Myrtle Mullis



Gallery Delta's annual show of young artists' work always holds the potential to be a highlight of the exhibition year: word is carried through the grapevine, spreading far beyond Harare, and no one can predict what will turn up on the Saturday morning when submissions are received. The process of selection is part bazaar, part tutorial; the beginners are encouraged and guided, the complacent are berated, the talented set a foot on the first rung of public exposure. Greg Shaw, the compiler of *Gallery's* School Activity Sheets, reviews the results, and six of the young artists themselves offer their reactions to the show.

This exhibition was notable for many reasons, not least the overwhelming quantity of work. Mostly painting, with a small number of graphics and sculpture; one hundred and thirteen works in all.

In recent years one has come to accept the strong influence of artists such as Meque, Witikani, Jali and Kashiri on both content and style in the work of developing artists. The reasons for this, I believe, are the limited educational facilities and exposure to external influences, but largely that the artists have established a direct and honest means of communication; the content of their work is easily accessible. To what extent, I asked myself, have the young artists of 2002 copied, or been influenced or inspired, by them? The answer: much less than I expected; in fact – apart from a few – very little.

There were many paintings in similar styles, mediums and techniques, but with different subjects. There were paintings with similar subjects, but viewed from original perspectives. And there was work that was innovative in style, application of medium, and content. On the whole, the exhibition was not a repetition of established artists' work; it offered direct accounts of the lives of the artists and their surroundings, borrowing only the accessibility of communication from Meque and others.

The exhibition comprised mostly figurative work, with strong social commentary and political undertones: portrayals of anger, poverty, violence and AIDS. It was professionally presented, technically competent, and displayed a solid understanding of formal characteristics.

Entering the gallery, one was faced with some of the most dynamic and innovative work of the show: Albert Kembo, and Admire Kamudzengerere's *Angry and Hungry*. In this large painting –

primarily gouache on newspaper – the image is of a man forced into a narrow composition, almost restrained by the boundaries of the format, slaughtering a cockerel. The palette of simple, pastel colours is strengthened by the use of pure black. The use of powerful lines of colour, rather than painted areas of tone, gave the work the freshness of a drawing. Light was created through the absence of paint, and the newspaper ground showing through. Whilst there is an obvious intuitive feel for space and the flow of movement and colour, one cannot help but notice that the drawing has been sacrificed, more to animation than mannerism. This is the only slight on an otherwise powerful and dramatic picture, in which the content is described through both the image and the style.

There were a number of artists describing and portraying in no uncertain terms their view of Zimbabwe 2002. Of these, Munyaradzi Mugorosa's *Grabbing Hands* presents a picture of theft, greed, isolation and impending doom; a warning of a bleak future. Allen Kupeta's *Liquidation* describes a group of workers looking on at the gates of a now unused factory. Although somewhat naively composed, this painting again portrays gloom and desolation, and a feeling that the factory controls the workers' lives, rather than the other way round. Its effect is enhanced by the crowd composition and the abandonment of proportion and perspective.

One of the more subtle pictures is Mugorosa's *The Plucking*, an amusing depiction of the exposure of a symbol. The painting features a plucked and bald cockerel, which is hanging its own laundered feathers out to dry. It is a wry look at a tired and tarnished institution, one well deserving of a re-vamp.

Two paintings with a particularly strong impact were Shepherd Raymond's *After the Incident* and Naison Magada's *Retaliation*. Shepherd pictures a woman stripped almost naked, her underwear

opposite page: Alberto
Quembo & Admire
Kamudzengerere
Angry and Hungry

right: Shepherd Raymond
After the Incident

middle: Naison Magada
Retaliation

bottom: Munyaradzi
Mugorosa
Grabbing Hands



torn and hanging off her. She is lying on her back on the floor. It is a simple story of rape, told in a confident style in a well-composed painting; a direct and all too common story.

Magada's *Retaliation* is painted and drawn in very naive manner. It shows a burning hut, with the arsonist running away from it. Two babies, a girl in school uniform, and a dog are forced from their home. It is the child-like honesty that gives the picture its impact. There is no room for fancy composition. There is no clever use of colour or spatial effect. There is no enhancement or embellishment of the simple episode: a hut is burned down in retaliation, and now two babies, a girl, their half-naked mother, and a dog have no home.

There was a group of pictures providing a commentary on daily life: Chibwana's *In a Pub*, Jorofani's *Knitting*, and *Sick lady*, and Tawenga Magada's *Divorce Letter*. One painting that deserves special mention is Rayson Hiyani's *Just Married*, which shows a naked young woman sitting on a bed, looking out at the viewer, possibly waiting for her husband. The painting is one of beauty, comfortably composed and exhibiting skillful draughtsmanship and soft, exquisite colours. Set amidst scenes of desolation and anger, it was unique in both its subject matter and its beauty.

Overall, the painting dominated the sculpture and graphics, although there was pleasing work from Peter Hove that displayed a command of the medium of stone. There was also some innovative and experimental work by Moyo (*The Guitarist*) and Mununguma (*The Elephant Man*). Although there were few graphics on show, most were of a high standard. One of the most impressive was Fungai Muduviwa's dry-point, *Sister's Portrait*, a soft but powerful piece, solemn in its simplicity.

Young Artists 2002 was an exhibition of energy and vitality that displayed a readiness to take risks in both medium and invention. Perhaps its greatest strength was that many of the artists had the courage to speak their minds about their lives so fearlessly, and to produce creative work without an obvious eye to the market.

There can be times when the desire to capture the limelight by creating new tricks and inventions becomes obsessive. Or when the making of art becomes an entirely academic process, involving the past more than the present. This was not such an exhibition. It was a display of work that had not been unduly laboured. It was uninhibited by excessive technical information. It was a refreshing and unique account of simple stories from a group of talented young artists.



Young Artists Exhibition 2002



What some of the young artists themselves thought of it...

Alberto Quembo:

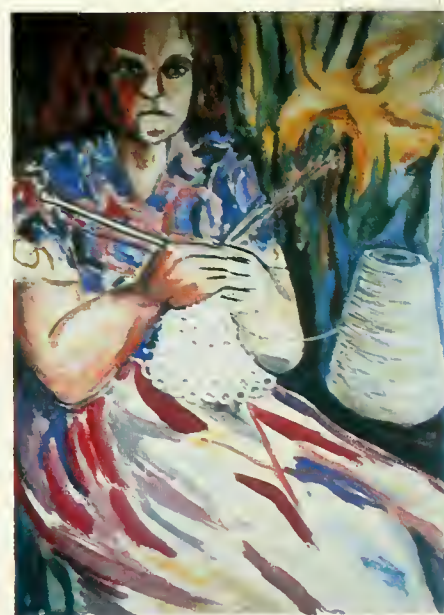
I can say I like the exhibition part by part. I would be happy to say the exhibition was half pleasing and half boring.

Why boring, firstly. We are tired of seeing the influence of Kashiri, Meque and Kambudzi. Young artists of this age rush to paint what they call 'the truth' happening in our society yet they are leaving the real truth behind. I quite like some works, which above all have proved the genuineness of carrying out experiments and individuality. Why do we need to hide behind the fact that we're expressing our feelings when actually we are copying? For I believe much in inspiration. Influence is like you call yourself an artist yet you're beginning where someone had finished off.

To say the truth. I like whoever it is who staged the works in that manner. The work in the first room, to me it was boring. Hey! We are tired of seeing such paintings concerning local and obvious ghetto scenes: people drinking, the gamblers. We have more serious issues happening to us, both

personal and social. We have AIDS, political unrest, religious issues and so forth.

Coming to the large hall of the gallery, I like very much the works of Fred Tauro, Batsirai and Moses (excluding myself: it's not that I hate my work or I like it, but I think so to be more fair). I don't like Chingoma's repetition of Kashiri's and Churu's themes. Themes done yesterlife. The very basic thing I would encourage when painting is: Think of your work first, express yourself with confidence. Money and Art are two different things, though money is part of art. But don't let it manipulate you for the sake of making you a slave of it. Let's forget about getting rich overnight. There are some works over-charged, but the work was not suitable to be charged so much. So I think money is the blind factor turning this young generation away from real art. To some extent other work was found to be very excellent. It really shows how some young people are struggling to know who they are, how they are, what they can do or say. To that I say: Very good. Keep the good things rolling.



top: Allen Kupeta
Liquidation

above: Batsirai Jorofani
Knitting

Daniel Williams:

When confronted with the huge array of work in the Young Artists' Exhibition 2002, one cannot help noticing the abundance of paintings, as opposed to graphics and sculpture.

There was some innovation in sculpture, but mostly in the use of various materials glued together, and nothing radically different. For its striking form and use of stone, I liked Peter Zuze's black *Hidden Face*, and the amusing experimental structures by Pilani Moyo (*The Guitarist*) and Tichaona Mununguma (*Elephant Man*).

The graphics, despite their small number, are of exceptional quality. There is a great range of drawings in pencil and paint, mostly of people or semi-representational figures, which display wonderful lines and contrast. The dry points by Fungai Munduviwa are especially striking in that there is an obvious social commentary behind the strongly delineated faces and forms: *Waiting* and *Victims* highlight this, but *Sister's Portrait* encapsulates it perfectly. The sister's face is softly worked, and beneath it is set a white crucifix contrasting the dark blue clothing: it is a strong, symbolic work.

It is in the paintings, however, that the socio-political commentary is strongest. There are only one or two landscapes, and a handful of interesting abstracts. In all the rest we see people in a multitude of activities and situations: sitting at tables or in bars, drinking or drunk; prostitutes lying on beds, waiting and watching; men and women working, carrying things, cooking, eating, hanging up washing; politicians and their supporters chanting and dancing. The range of expression varies from the unusual purples and greens of Rayson Hinyani (*Pregnant with Twins*), to the caricatured effects of *Victim* by Chrispen Bere; from the challenging, almost pornographic, images of Patrick Rapai, Bothwell Dumezulu and Naison Magada to the vivid expressionistic works by Taffi Marekera. These seem to convey several messages about our society, its habits and customs, its vibrancy and vitality, and also its many problems and threats.

The young artists of Zimbabwe are not only trying to portray the tough realities of life, but are also finding wide-ranging styles and subjects through which they can express themselves. I think that this is a candid exhibition: the work is more explicit, graphic and unequivocal than that of many established artists, and is more literal than symbolic. The strength of many of these young artists in their themes and concerns augurs well for the future.

Sibongile Marowa:

This exhibition really showed how different artists can come up with interesting topics for their paintings as well as how to mix and use different colours of paint to illustrate or to make you feel the strength in the painting.

As for the paintings that I think are the best, the one about the people who were playing cards – that I liked a lot because it had that striking effect that you would feel as if you are there watching the card game. I guess that a painting or drawing can show what a person's life is like. Secondly, the one of a girl who was raped and was now lying on the ground, that painting has a lot of texture. Most of these paintings are on women. There is the one about the woman who is pregnant and if you try and make a small composition I would say this woman is carrying the man's baby and they are talking about it. The man and his dog are standing at the door as if they don't want this woman to come in. Maybe this woman was trying to elope.

Mostly the paintings show prostitutes and what they do. It seems as if these artists were trying to put one message across and that was: prostitution leads to AIDS and unwanted babies. I think the portraits are eye-catching with a lot of tone and texture. Far more interesting, with the striking effect of movement, was a painting of the busy marketplace. If you look at it and use your imagination you can as well see the people moving up and down, and the buses going in and out, although I think it is *too* busy. The painting of the policeman and the two thieves, it also has effect of movement.

There is a painting that is eye-catching and this is the one on the train that really shows the movement of the train; that painting is really good. But the one next to it also by the same painter is not interesting; if someone who doesn't know anything about art was to see it he or she would just say, what is this? I don't think it has that energy in it. I don't know the topic of the painting but from what I think I guess it has something to do with buildings in the city.

But I thank you for making this exhibition be there. It really makes people like us who are still learning on paints, colours, texture, structure as well as tone and how to use them, as well as how to put a message across through paintings and art and how to do research.



above: Batsirai Jorofani
Sick Lady

below: George Chibwana
In a Pub



Alexandra Wernberg:

A vibrant, exciting and inspiring exhibition. I personally love the amazing use and amount of such incredible colour. To me colour is very special; we start by learning to draw and we draw and draw – once one masters drawing, which honestly is a never-ending quest, we move on to composition, which too goes on forever. And then it's colour, which is most difficult of all, I think. So many of the young artists' work is so mature in their use of colour, which I feel is a great achievement.

Colour also expresses how we feel as individuals or even as a nation. In such times of darkness, terror, pain and fear I am so moved to see such energy in the work of artists who also suffer in these desperate times.

The work here is bright, colourful and energetic, even if the subject matter is of this terrible suffering. Chrispen Bere's *Victim* is of a horrific political scene, that is tragically becoming part of daily life in Zimbabwe: a man has been killed in political violence; it is a horrifying scene but it is so colourful and he has painted it with such passion.

This exhibition has such refreshing variety: abstraction, realism and imagination. There is also so much variety in media used: collage, oil, gouache, textiles, etc. Tonal values!

I am most inspired and admire paintings by Shepherd Chandomba – *I've seen a lot*, *Silence*, and *Memories*. They each tell you a story, a story of that person's life. The titles, which I feel are important (not always essential) really add to the paintings. 'I've seen a lot'. Yes, in her eyes one can tell there is pain and knowledge, knowledge of having seen a lot. Her face has so much character, also giving it great effectiveness – she is old, and time has given her the chance to have seen so much! The fabric in this painting is beautiful.

Silence is the most meaningful to me. She is so real, her eyes too tell a story – one I imagine is of pain and sorrow (much like real people are feeling today in this beautiful but terrifying land). She has a story to tell – whether it be a sad or happy one – but the 'Silence' makes me feel like she does not want to tell it. The colour is so beautiful – I strive to paint like this! I really love the unfinished touch to all three and it finishes them beautifully! It is so effective.

Peter Chagondomara's *Keep on Going* is so symbolic. The shoes are tatty and broken but are drawn so beautifully and precisely. The sunset is beautiful too – but the theme is sad – a man's shoes have worn away – but he 'keeps on going' – barefoot! Even when there is so much bad, there will always be



HOPE and he 'keeps on going'. It is lovely and the colours are so joyful and bold! And an *ndoro* has been drawn on the shoe – Ndoro – African – going on forever – hope – a sign of wealth – not money but in his soul – the strength to go on when all is destroyed.

I really enjoy Edson Colaco's two untitled drawings. I feel that it brings the entire exhibition back to earth – back to the basics of art: drawing. They are lovely. I appreciate simplicity – beautiful.

Munyaradzi Mugarosa's *Plucking* is totally unique! I imagine that there is a deeper underlying meaning, however I feel that it is not important to always look for something deeper – but really enjoy the art work for its face value – what you see – and not what you think you should see. It is fun – beautiful – makes you smile – something that I feel is important about art – it creates an emotion or many emotions in you! I believe if a work of art makes its viewer feel something – even if it is total disgust – the artist has succeeded – but if the viewer looks at that painting and feels nothing – and simply passes by – then either the artist has failed or the viewer is ignorant! (Possibly either way the artist may not worry about what the painting means to anyone but himself.)

There is so much use of imagination in all of the works – in such times it is refreshing to have this because I feel people have become so rigid in their ways. It is brilliant – an exhibition that inspires me so greatly.

Munyaradzi Mugarosa
The Plucking

Nontsikelelo Motiti:

The exhibition show-cased numerous artworks produced by young aspiring artists of Zimbabwe. Most of the work on display came from students, both past and present, of the National Gallery Workshop and the Harare Polytechnic.

The gallery space was dominated by paintings, with the walls being covered from eye level to just below the ceiling. There were a number of graphics on display and a few sculptures, both stone and scrap metal.

I found that there was a general trend towards figurative studies running through both paintings and graphics. Although the subject was the same, the approaches ranged from naive representations to sustained figure studies and genre scenes. Few works had any symbolic significance, but rather gave the audience a snapshot insight into the everyday lives of the average local and the artists' immediate surroundings. Some paintings were a bit more narrative and told of an event or circumstance.

From looking at the work on exhibit it was obvious that many of the young artists have been influenced by those more prominent and established artists of our time (those now late and those still exhibiting). There were similar approaches to that of Hilary Kashiri, Louis Meque, and Lovemore Kambudzi to name a few. This evidence of influence highlights the early development of almost all aspiring artists. Technique and subject matter of more famous artists is not copied as such, but is studied and used by others as a way of gaining confidence with a certain medium or means of understanding concepts still difficult for themselves but already mastered and put into practice by others. Ideally these borrowed elements will be transformed by the artist into his own style as he comes into his own and discovers his own creative identity.

I enjoyed this exhibition as it was an opportunity to see what other young people are doing with their creative talent. It was refreshing to see so many different approaches and subjects and this has inspired me to be more confident and experimental as far as my own work goes. It was also a great experience for me as one of the few females to exhibit and I hope in future more young women will bring their work in for selection.

Ana Uzelac:

To paint or to draw is to express a vision of a creation that is beyond our understanding. Just as the forces of nature and soul created their masterpiece, the earth, the human race gains inspiration and feeling from our earth and our people and so we too create our own personal image of our thoughts and vision. This I believe to be art.

What fascinated me with the young artists exhibition is that some of these young men and women had no knowledge of the methods and techniques of how to perceive art, yet still they had the feeling to interpret themselves through painting and drawing that was completely free. Every artist has a desire for knowledge that is beyond learning, and so cannot be tested. He or she seeks a depicted truth, a moment of realisation and inspiration from within, brought out on paper so as to remind them of what was felt or simply because it needed to be let out of the body of the artist. In this way, the artist's visions can be displayed to mankind so that we too can perhaps relate to what the artist felt and saw.

Art holds a divine and ancient beauty that does not require the explanation of words. It is the projection of thought, feeling and creation which exists in people. It holds no limits, as long as the artist is Free.✍

Photographs: Greg Shaw



top: Rayson Hiyani
Just Married

right: Tawenga Magada
Divorce Letter

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